Developments

Volume 26, Issue 4 | Winter 2006/2007

The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2005

In the fall of 2005, the Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission (AADAC) undertook the second cycle of The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES) to measure alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use and gambling activity among Alberta students in grades 7 through 12. The survey also examined risk and protective factors and their relationship with substance use and gambling activity. In 2005, 3,915 students participated in the survey.

The primary objective of TAYES 2005 was to measure alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use and gambling activity among Alberta students in grades 7 through 12. The second objective was to examine the environment in which the use or gambling takes place: TAYES 2005 examined students' perceptions of levels of use and ease of access to substances and gambling activities, the level of parental monitoring they received, their perceptions of their own academic performance and school enjoyment, and their attendance at raves and outdoor parties.

This issue of *Developments* presents some of the results of the survey. The Back Page of this issue will link you to available resources related to TAYES 2005.

A summary report of TAYES 2005 and four two-page summaries ("Profiles") were released in early February. Check the Back Page of upcoming issues of *Developments* to be notified as brief reports are released on specific subjects.

The most notable changes found in TAYES 2005 were in the proportion of Alberta youth who are current drinkers (had at least one alcoholic drink in the 12 months before the survey, not counting sips) and the proportion who had gambled in the previous year.

In 2002, just over half (56.3%) of those surveyed were current drinkers; the figure has moved up to almost two-thirds (63.4%). Current gamblers increased from 41.2% of youth in 2002 to 62.6% in 2005. Another important finding in 2005 was that about one-third of respondents were involved in hazardous drinking and binge drinking.

Use of cannabis, the most commonly used drug after alcohol, was almost unchanged between 2002 and 2005.

Playing cards for money became the most popular form of gambling among youth, increasing by over 18 percentage points. In 2003, 23.0% of youth had played cards for money in the previous 12 months. That figure rose to 41.3% in 2005.

TAYES 2005 found that students who did not use substances were most likely to have parents who monitored their activities, and were most likely to feel engaged in school and to enjoy

school. Those who neither gambled nor used substances were most likely to perceive their academic performance as being above average.

Read on for a more detailed account of the findings of TAYES 2005.

Student Substance Use and Gambling

What substances did The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES) 2005 ask adolescents about?

In the survey, students were asked to report the frequency of their alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use. Illicit drugs included in the questionnaire were cannabis, glues and solvents, and selected hallucinogens, stimulants, opioid drugs, tranquillizers and club drugs. In the case of tobacco, most questions were asked about smoking rather than chewing tobacco. Thus, throughout this issue of *Developments*, tobacco use refers to smoking.

What substances do youth most commonly use?

Alcohol is by far the most frequently consumed substance, followed at some distance by cannabis. It is difficult to compare tobacco use, because a current smoker was defined as someone who had smoked in the previous 30 days, whereas a current user of alcohol or cannabis was defined as someone who had used in the previous 12 months. Use of any single type of illicit substance (excluding cannabis) was relatively low; a large majority of youth (71.2%) had never used any illicit drug other than cannabis.

How many youth drink alcohol?

Almost two-thirds (63.4%) of Alberta students surveyed were classified as current drinkers, meaning that they had consumed at least one alcoholic drink in the 12 months before the survey (excluding sips). This is a substantial increase from 2002, when 56.3% reported past-year alcohol use. The proportion of current drinkers rises year by year as students progress in school, going from 19.1% of Grade 7 students to 86.0% of Grade 12 students.

Male students (66.0%) are more likely than females (61.2%) to report past-year use of alcohol.

How common are hazardous drinking and binge drinking?

To measure hazardous drinking, TAYES 2005 used the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT), a method of screening for excessive drinking established by the World Health Organization. Those who have a pattern of drinking that increases their risk of harming someone else or being harmed by their own drinking (accidentally or with intent) are hazardous drinkers.

Overall, 33.2% of current drinkers (see previous question to define current drinkers) meet the AUDIT criteria for hazardous drinking; males and females demonstrate similar levels of hazardous drinking (33.5% and 32.9% respectively). The proportion increases as students progress in school, going from 5.9% of Grade 7 students to 39.9% of Grade 12 students.

Binge drinking, defined as consuming five or more drinks on a single occasion in the month

before the survey, is similarly common, with 31.3% of current drinkers reporting incidents of binge drinking. Males and females are almost equally likely to binge, and there is significant year-by-year increase in binge drinking as students progress from Grade 7, when only 3.0% of students report binging, to Grade 12 (47.5%).

How many students smoke tobacco?

Smoking is not common among Alberta youth: 13.5% reported that they smoked at least one cigarette in the 30 days before the survey.

High school students were more likely than junior high school students to report smoking in the 30 days before the survey: 18.3% versus 4.6% of junior high students.

Males and females were about equally likely to report smoking, but girls started smoking earlier than boys. The most common time for girls to have smoked their first whole cigarette was between age 13 and 14; for boys, it was age 15 or older.

How common is cannabis use?

Cannabis, the second most popular drug, was much less frequently used than alcohol: only 26.7% of students used cannabis in the 12 months before the survey. Prevalence of cannabis use remained consistent with levels in 2002, when 27.6% of students reported using in the 12 months before the survey. The proportion of current users increases consistently as students go from Grade 8 to Grade 12, with a smaller increase between grades 7 and 8.

More males (29.4%) than females (24.4%) used cannabis in the year before the survey.

How many Alberta students use illicit substances?

Illicit substances are psychoactive drugs whose production, sale, possession or use is prohibited by law. This category does not include alcohol and tobacco, as they are legally available in Alberta to those aged 18 and over.

TAYES 2005 findings show that 25.4% of students reported using illicit substances, excluding cannabis, in the 12 months before the survey. Over 70% of students have never used illicit drugs, excluding cannabis.

In the category of illicit substances excluding cannabis, the survey questioned youth about selected substances: glues, solvents and specific types of hallucinogens, stimulants, opioid drugs, tranquillizers and club drugs. Of these, the most commonly used are hallucinogens (including mescalin and psilocybin, or magic mushrooms, but excluding LSD or PCP): 9.1% of all students reported past-year use.

Other illicit drugs students reported using in the 12 months before the survey include ecstasy (6.4%), cocaine (4.2%), stimulants (3.7%), solvents (3.3%), and glue (2.7%). Only 1.1% of students (junior high and high school combined) reported using crystal meth in the previous 12 months.

The use of stimulants, crack, and tranquillizers decreased since 2002, whereas use of cocaine increased. Crystal meth use cannot be compared, since use was not measured separately in

2002.

For all illicit substances other than solvents and glue, high school students are more likely than junior high students to report past-year use.

More females (31.7%) than males (25.5%) report ever using illicit drugs. Females are also more likely to report past-year illicit drug use (28.7% versus 21.8% for males).

How many adolescents gamble?

Almost two-thirds (62.6%) of Alberta youth surveyed had participated in selected gambling activities in the 12 months before the survey. Overall prevalence of gambling has increased since 2002, when 41.2% of adolescents reported past-year gambling activity.

Participation in all gambling activities examined in the survey increased since 2002. The greatest increase in participation was playing cards for money, with 23.0% of students in 2002 and 41.3% of students in 2005 reporting past-year engagement in this activity. Playing cards for money was the most popular type of gambling.

Other gambling activities for which past-year participation increased substantially were playing bingo, betting on sporting events, and playing other lotteries.

In the 12 months before the survey, high school students were more likely than junior high students to have indulged in all types of gambling measured except bingo. Males (68.6%) were more likely than females (57.5%) to report that they had gambled in that time period.

How common is problem gambling?

The survey used the South Oaks Gambling Screen—Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA) to determine the prevalence of at-risk gambling and problem gambling. At-risk gamblers are those who gamble frequently with one resulting problem or gamble less frequently with two or more problems. Problem gamblers include those who gamble daily and those who gamble weekly with two or more resulting problems.

Most students who gambled were non-problem gamblers (gamble with none or one of 12 possible problems described in SOGS-RA), whether they were in junior high school (92.5%) or in senior high (91.2%). Overall, 2.4% of students were problem gamblers, and 5.9% were at-risk gamblers. Males who gamble (3.0%) are more likely than females (1.9%) to be either at-risk or problem gamblers.

How does substance use and gambling activity compare from region to region across the province?

This question has to be answered with caution, because TAYES 2005 was not able to survey Calgary schools. However, in general, substance use and gambling is lower in Edmonton than in the Central, North and South areas. This is consistent with findings by other researchers that rural areas and suburbs show higher substance use than metropolitan areas. The North and Central regions showed higher alcohol use among youth than the South and Edmonton do. Tobacco smoking rates were higher in the South and North than in Edmonton and Central areas. The Central region was higher than the North, the South, and Edmonton for cannabis

use. Gambling was higher in the Central and North regions than in Edmonton and the South, but hazardous gambling was higher in Edmonton and the Central regions than in the North and South.

How do Alberta youth compare with others in Canada?

To make comparisons with other provinces, TAYES 2005 used the most recent available data. This may cause some difficulty, since data come from different years. For example, there appears to be a large difference between the proportion of current drinkers among youth in Alberta and Nova Scotia. However, the Nova Scotia figure (51.7%) is from 2002 and the Alberta figure (63.4%) is from 2005. The comparable Alberta figure from 2002 is actually 56.3%. Provincial comparison is further limited by the fact that similar student surveys have not been done at all in the provinces of Saskatchewan and British Columbia, nor in any of the three territories.

The proportion of students reporting past-year alcohol use in Alberta (63.4% current drinkers) is surpassed only by that in Quebec (69.0%). In other provinces, the proportion of students consuming alcohol was lower, with Prince Edward Island reporting the lowest level (49.0%).

In Quebec, the only other province to report on past-30-day smoking, the proportion of students smoking was higher than that in Alberta (23.1% versus 13.5%).

Youth in Manitoba and Quebec (both 39.1%) were most likely to report past-year cannabis use, followed by those in Nova Scotia (36.5%), Newfoundland and Labrador (35.0%), and New Brunswick (35.0%). Over one-quarter (26.7%) of Alberta adolescents reported using cannabis in the 12 months before the survey. In Ontario (26.5%) and Prince Edward Island (24.0%), students were least likely to report cannabis use.

Of the provinces that collected information on gambling behaviour, Newfoundland and Labrador (65.0%) and Nova Scotia (63.0%) had the highest proportions of youth reporting past-year gambling. Almost two-thirds (62.6%) of Alberta youth reported gambling in the 12 months before the survey, followed by Prince Edward Island (60.0%), New Brunswick (58.0%), and Quebec (51.1%).

Past-year substance use and gambling activity among youth, by province (as percentages)

Province, survey year	Alcohol	Tobacco	Cannabis	Gambling
Alberta, 2005	63.4	13.5*	26.7	62.6
Ontario, 2005	62.0	14.4	26.5	NA
Nova Scotia, 2002	51.7	23.2	36.5	63.0
Quebec, 2002	69.0	23.1*	39.1	51.1
Prince Edward Island, 2002	49.0	18.0	24.0	60.0
Newfoundland & Labrador (island only), 2003	58.0	27.0	35.0	65.0
New Brunswick, 2002	53.0	21.0	35.0	58.0
Manitoba, 2004	58.8	24.8	39.1	NA

Note: Most tobacco results measure past-year smokers, but Alberta and Quebec measure past-30-day smoking, including daily or occasional smokers. Tobacco use results from Alberta and Quebec are therefore not comparable to the results of other provinces.

The Setting: Student Perceptions and Experiences

Are youth aware of the prevalence of substance use?

For the most part, youth overestimate substance use among their peers. Although only 18.3% of high school students used tobacco in the 30 days before the survey, students in grades 10 through 12 believed that 46.3% of their peers had smoked tobacco. Cannabis use was estimated at 44.5% in the 12 months before the survey; the actual figure was 34.5%. Use of crystal meth was highly overestimated: high school students thought 11.6% of their peers had used crystal meth in the year before the survey, whereas only 1.3% of high school students reported using the drug. The one exception to this pattern is alcohol: 76.9% of high school students reported drinking in the previous 12 months; students estimated that only 74.3% drank.

How do substance use and gambling affect academic performance?

We cannot draw definite conclusions about the effect of substance use and gambling, but there is an association between these activities and perceived academic performance.

The survey compared students who were users and non-users of each substance, and participants and non-participants in gambling. Overall, 3.9% of students surveyed perceived their academic performance to be below average, 62.9% considered their performance to be average, and 33.2% saw their performance as above average. No matter which substance was the focus, students who did not use that substance rated their performance higher than the group who did. Similarly, those who did not gamble rated their academic performance higher than current gamblers rated theirs.

Of all groups studied, those who did not drink (37.9%) were most likely to perceive their academic performance to be above average, illicit drug users (20.3%) were the least likely to see their performance as above average, and cannabis users (8.8%) were most likely to see themselves as below average.

Is there an association between enjoying school and substance use or gambling?

Of all user and non-user groups studied, non-drinkers had the highest probability of liking school "very much" or "quite a lot" (37.8% versus 27.7% of all students). Cannabis users were least likely (19.2%) to feel this way. Current users of other illicit drugs were most likely (35.2%) to say they did not like school very much or did not like it at all. No matter which substance was concerned, non-users are more likely than users to say they like school, and users are more likely than non-users to say they do not. Likewise, current non-gamblers liked school more than gamblers.

How is parental monitoring associated with substance use?

The survey measured whether students felt their parents knew where they were after school, and knew where they were and whom they were with when they went out at night. It also asked whether students had to be home at a set time on weekend nights. Responses were correlated with students' use of substances.

Students who did not use substances of any type reported the highest parental monitoring on all these measures. Of the students who used substances, current drinkers reported the highest level of parental monitoring for all measures of monitoring used in the survey.

Tobacco smokers were least likely to report that their parents knew where they were after school or whom they were with when they went out at night. Illicit drug users were the least likely to say that their parents knew where they were when they went out at night, and least likely to have to be home at a set time on weekend nights.

How is substance use associated with attendance at raves and outdoor parties?

Substance users were more likely than non-users to attend raves and outdoor parties, whether the substance in question was alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs (including cannabis). Current users of illicit drugs other than cannabis were more likely to attend outdoor parties (79.9%) and raves (36.8%) than all other user and non-user groups.

Overall, more students attended outdoor parties (44.2%) than raves (18.6%) in the year preceding the survey.

What are "risk and protective factors" and why are they important?

Certain life events and conditions have been shown to increase the likelihood of problematic behaviour like substance abuse or problem gambling. These experiences are called risk factors. Protective factors are those that moderate the effects of risk factors. Scientific literature has identified over 250 risk factors and 150 protective factors.

TAYES research is based on a risk and protective factor framework that organizes factors in five life domains: individual, family, school, peer and community. Risk of problematic behaviour is affected by the number of risk factors and the interaction between those risk factors, and the interaction between risk and protective factors.

Past Alberta research has shown that the most important risk factors for harmful use of substances and gambling are

- age of user
- peer risk behaviour
- family history of substance abuse
- family discord
- poor connections to school life

The most important protective factors against harmful use of substances and gambling by Alberta youth are

- parental monitoring
- good social skills

- availability of and participation in pro-social activities
- high school marks
- sound and positive connections to school life

The strongest risk factor found in Alberta research has been age: from grades 7 to 12, the higher the grade, the greater the proportion of youth involved in both substance use and gambling. Analysis of TAYES 2005 research thus far bears out this observation. Conversely, of course, being younger is associated with being less likely to be a current gambler or user of substances.

How will AADAC use the results from TAYES?

TAYES provides current, relevant information about youth substance use and gambling behaviour. Knowing how many young people are using substances and gambling, and how many are harmfully involved in these activities, gives us an idea of the scope of the problems that AADAC is dealing with, and helps us to design effective prevention and treatment programs. Knowing the context in which use takes place helps us to target our efforts to best meet the needs of young Albertans.

Because it is the second cycle of the survey, TAYES 2005 allows us to begin to see patterns in substance use and gambling activity. When we see significant changes over time, we can revise our programming accordingly, changing direction and allocation of resources to best serve young Albertans.

The Back Page

AADAC RESOURCES

AADAC has developed materials to provide summary and comprehensive results from TAYES 2005.

Reports

- The Alberta Youth Experience Survey (TAYES) 2005: Summary Report provides an overview of the survey's key findings. It summarizes the prevalence of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use and gambling activity. The report also examines harm associated with substance use and gambling behaviour and information about student attitudes, perceptions and social networks, in relation to substance use and gambling activity.

- Alcohol Use Among Alberta Youth: The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2005 provides a comprehensive analysis of alcohol use among Alberta youth. This report includes prevalence information by age, grade, region and living arrangement, and investigates harmful use of alcohol among adolescents. An examination of risk and protective factors associated with alcohol use is also presented in the findings.

Profiles

- Alcohol Use Among Alberta Youth presents an overview on past-year alcohol use, grade at first use of alcohol, binge drinking and hazardous drinking.

- Tobacco Use Among Alberta Youth offers an overview on tobacco use, smoking initiation and exposure to second-hand smoke. In this profile, TAYES 2005 findings are supplemented with information from the Youth Smoking Survey 2004–2005.

- Illicit Drug Use Among Alberta Youth summarizes past-year cannabis and other illicit drug use among Alberta youth.

- Youth Gambling in Alberta gives an overview of gambling activity among Alberta youth. The report includes findings on gambling prevalence and participation in eight selected gambling activities. Also included is a summary of adolescent problem gambling.

In 2007, AADAC will publish additional comprehensive reports on illicit drug and tobacco use.

TAYES 2005 reports and profiles are available on AADAC's website, aadac.com.

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The Calgary Counselling Centre presents the **2007 Family Violence Conference: Controversial Issues in Family Violence**, on May 3, 4 and 5, 2007.

Join us for our second annual Family Violence Conference. Four engaging speakers are slated to give you information on the current issues in family violence: addictions, individual treatment with offenders and work with couples.

- Hear the innovative Dr. William Fals-Stewart and benefit from his work with couples dealing with family violence and addictions.
- Develop clinical skills with Dr. Christopher Murphy, an expert in individual treatment with domestic violence offenders.
- Learn from Dr. Eric McCollum and Dr. Sandra Stith, who will give you best practices regarding conjoint treatment of couples who have experienced intimate partner violence.

For more information, speaker biographies and registration, visit the Calgary Counselling Centre website.

Download the registration form. (PDF)

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ISSN: 1712-1736